

Katherine Butterfield – Expedition Fund Report

What I did

Over the summer I took part in the QMUL run summer programme to Shanghai, China. This involved studying Chinese at the partner university of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics for two months.

The programme included 3 hours of basic Chinese mandarin a day, as well as two hours of cultural Chinese classes a week. In the Chinese language classes we started from the very beginning, learning phonetics first and then moving onto basic phrases such as “hello” “how are you?”, working our way up through the weeks to learning some sentence structure. This was helpful to me as a refresher, however I had already learnt most of what was taught because I’d taken beginner classes at QMUL with the Confucius institute. However, my level was not so advanced as to move into the next level of classes on the summer programme, so I stayed in the beginner’s class.

Cultural class consisted of such Chinese traditions as paper folding and cutting, model making, dumpling making etc. This was a nice break from the intensive morning language classes.

On the programme we were taken on various trips around Shanghai. In the first two weeks we took trips to the traditional water villages of Wuzhen and Zhouzhang. This was extremely interesting, as the traditional houses and waterways were preserved for their beauty, in stark contrast to the modern Shanghai. We also took trips to businesses such as Bao Steel’s plant and the Skoda and VW car manufacturing plant. These trips were fascinating, as for the first time I saw the large scale of manufacturing and industry in China. When you drive through Bao Steel’s factory site, which is the size of a large city, there is no wonder that their economy grew so quickly, nor that it is a growing world power.

Outside regular classes, our tightknit group went on a number of our own excursions, which were relatively cheap due to taking sleeper trains instead of bullets and sleeping in hostels rather than hotels. We went first to Beijing, to see the Forbidden City and the Great Wall of China. The wall was extremely impressive, and I believe it may have been the best day of the entire trip. We also went to the scenic city of Hangzhou and walked around the West Lake, with its many historic buildings and attractions. We additionally made a day trip to Shanghai Disney Land, which was not as enjoyable as expected due to overcrowding and the incredible heat of the day. We also went to the Huangshan mountain range, which was extremely awe-inspiring.

On the last weekend, a friend and I took a trip to the island of Shengsi, to see the scenic beaches they had there, and to escape from the city.

How the fund helped

The fund helped me cover the cost of the visa to China, which I was incredibly grateful for as I was funding the rest of my trip myself out of my student finance loan and the income from a part time job.

Expectations of the trip

I had no expectations for the trip, apart from that I was extremely excited to visit China, a place I'd always wanted to go. I did of course wish to learn some Chinese and was slightly disappointed that I simply refreshed what I already knew, however it was incredibly useful to refresh, as well as use what I knew to talk and practice with the locals.

How it contributed to academic progress

This trip was incredibly useful in terms of cultural experience, as I learnt what life is like in China, the cultural norms and how people act. I also gained a greater proficiency in Chinese, which I hope to someday master. This experience shall be incredibly useful in the future, as I hope to take in the third year, a module from SOAS on Chinese Politics, and possibly complete my dissertation on political developments in the east, primarily China.

It also helped make a decision in terms of post graduate study in China, as the school and the government offer scholarships to study Chinese for a year. I decided I would be happy living in China for a year to help further my knowledge of their culture, business practise and especially language. This shall most certainly improve my employability in terms of English-Chinese relations.